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Gay Lib. Spokeswoman (an interview with Carol Savoie)

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Carol Savoie, a senior psychology is a self-avowed lesbian who also considers herself a militant feminist.

Last semester she taught an Abenaki course entitled "Homosexuality—perspectives and prejudices." At that time, she said she was "not interested in dealing with homosexuality as an illness, perversion or abnormality, but as an aspect of the life experience of a significant number of people." The informal discussion group gradually enlarged until she could no longer hold sessions at her apartment in Old Town. The group's focus changed, too, from an academic discussion of homosexuality to a social-support group for gays who previously had no way to meet except clandestinely.

This week the Campus talked to Savoie. Following are excerpts from that interview in which she expressed views ranging from her personal decision to "come out" or openly declare her sexuality to campus reaction to the presence of gays.

CAMPUS: Why did you decide to declare your homosexuality publicly?

Savoie: I don't know exactly why I did it. I came out this summer, but when I came back to school I was still a virgin. I told myself, 'For christsake, will you quit playing around? Of course you're gay. Get over this terror of yourself.'

And I decided if I had gone through so much, if it took me so long, then there were probably other people in the same boat.

Part of coming out is pride and a

refusal to be stomped on. I refuse to be intimidated by other people's judgments. It gets really tiresome if you have a sense of your own dignity. You get angry and fed up and say, 'look you guys—this is crazy. I'm as good as you. Now get off my back. I'm not going to believe I'm a shit anymore.'

But it's difficult because you're immersed in straight society with all its expectations. I'm 22 and I'm single. I go home and I tell my mother that I'm not getting married. She says, 'Oh, you wait. The right man will come along.' My parents can't wait. They're getting nervous because I'm 22 and graduating and I'm not engaged.

"My parents would die. I have a lot to lose."

I live two hours away from here. My parents don't know I'm gay. I'm Franco-American Catholic. My parents would die. I have a lot to lose.

CAMPUS: Aren't you afraid they will discover you're gay after the CAMPUS interviews you?

Savoie: No. This is a relatively obscure paper. I doubt they will see it, or hear about it.

I have a cousin here, people from my home town. And I go around sometimes when I'm not feeling too good about myself, kind of nervous. But I get feedback from people in the group, and I feel it's worth the nervousness,

CAMPUS: Do you feel you have gained by coming out?

Savoie: I think I've gained personally. I could have this as a dark, dirty secret and run around as if I were persecuted, or else I could say I'm gay.

There's something self-destructive about hiding something about yourself, something essential.

One thing I really hate though—because so few people have come out, the few who have come out have to talk about it.

CAMPUS: Would you encourage others to take the step you have—encourage others to come out?

Savoie: I don't think we can feel confident. Individuals can. Individuals can make adjustments. Some can risk things others can't because of jobs and personalities.

A lot of people who are not sure, who have gone to shrinks, are coming to the groups, talking to people and identifying with some of their feelings.

The women are not pressuring other women. Some women come and talk about their feelings. Some come out. That doesn't mean they've made it with another woman, but they've recognized themselves as basically gay.

CAMPUS: Isn't it a downer when you consider the effects coming out will have on your future?

Savoie: Can you find a job that allows you to be open? That's the question I struggled with. If I went on in psychology, I could see myself as a counselor. But I know I'm a radical feminist and a gay woman. And that's the kind of counselor that I would be.

I don't think it limits my ability to serve, but probably would limit my credibility in people's minds.

CAMPUS: You mentioned shrinks. Do you feel psychology misrepresents homosexuals?

Savoie: Yes. I'm a psychology major. One of the biggest hassles was reading that crap and realizing that was the judgment people in my own field were making about me.

Many gay people hate their psychiatrist because they've been manipulated.

I went to a counselor several years ago. Fortunately, he was a fairly nice person and fairly neutral. He reinforced all my heterosexual feelings to the hilt, which got tiresome when I wanted to come out.

But, then, he probably didn't want to encourage something harder.

CAMPUS: Do you think the views in psychology will change?

Savoie: They have to. A lot of gays are in psychology. A lot of gays are boycotting psychology, too. Just as women are, for the same reasons, because they are so misrepresented in the views. It's like marijuana smokers—you can't stamp them out with bad vibes. There are too many in high positions who know that it's lies.

That's why I think togetherness of gays is important. They won't get over the shit until they start talking to each other.

CAMPUS: What response did you receive after coming out?

Savoie: After I came out people were talking to me. Students I didn't know would come up to me and say, 'Wow! I think that's a great thing you're doing.'

Gay men would come up and start talking to me. I wondered why they weren't talking to other gay guys.

Then my name was printed in the Abenaki catalog. I lived off campus, so I didn't get too much shit. But if I had lived on campus, the dorms and all the men would have been hasseling me.

CAMPUS: What is the general campus attitude toward gays?

Savoie: Colleges tend to have more deviants, so they tend to be more tolerant of deviants. The way students are selected brings more deviants here. People dare to be deviant here if they didn't dare at home, so you get a big population.

Maine as a state is behind, but this campus is really behind. North or South—Boston or New York—gays make pilgrimages regularly because they get so claustrophobic up here. It's unfortunate because people here don't want anything to do with bars and that scene.

CAMPUS: Is anti-homosexual feeling on campus primarily a group social feeling? Are individuals more tolerant outside the group?

Savoie: Yes. The group works very strongly. The men have pressure on them to be male, including their reactions to gays.

The group I identify as most hostile is fraternities. They are the most hostile. Probably some houses have a high percentage of gays, and they are very hostile. You hear some pretty crude stories.

CAMPUS: How many gays do you estimate are on campus?

Savoie: At least 20 percent of the men are part-time gay. Women are harder to identify. Many women are gay, but not overtly. They relate to women but don't think of it as gay.

CAMPUS: I don't know how naive I am, but 20 percent sounds high to me.

Savoie: Does it? I think there's a surprising number. If one day everyone who's gay turned purple, everyone would freak out. Gays are in positions that would surprise and shock everyone—which is ridiculous because they are doing good jobs, good work. But they're wasting energy hiding.

CAMPUS: How many of that twenty percent define themselves as gay?

Savoie: That would be a smaller fraction, of course. But if you take 'prefer,' or 'prefer the company of,' or 'relate more deeply with'—if you take that definition which probably is a woman's definition, then 20 percent.

I have one sexual classification myself. It includes the whole range of human sexuality. I can be celibate, sexual with myself, sexual with women, sexual only with men. I can distinguish, I can channel myself into one of these behaviors or I can cut myself off. Or I can relate at different times to all kinds of people. All these behaviors are essentially human. Human beings potentially can relate to all other human beings.

In this culture heterosexuality is highly reinforced. I don't know why we are in such a panic to encourage population growth.

CAMPUS: If heterosexual behavior is so highly reinforced, why are some people gay?

Savoie: Who knows? Because they are? I don't think it is completely innate. It's a learned thing. A learned preference. I may be a potential hetero but I'm not acting out that part of myself. I've chosen not to because I have a preference for women.

CAMPUS: How did you acquire this learned preference?

Savoie: From the kind of experiences I had—the quality and quantity.

CAMPUS: The gay-support group that you are involved with is off-campus. Why is that?

Savoie: The group started last semester, but the first meeting this semester was packed. There was no way I could continue that way if it kept expanding. We tried to get a place. We wanted one off-campus because some members have a lot to lose by being discovered. Or just by being seen. Also about one-fourth of the people who attend are off-campus.

"Recognition by the university is a big step."

CAMPUS: Do you expect to acquire university recognition?

Savoie: I don't know if it is going to come this semester. If not, probably next. I think recognition by the university is a big step. As a student organization, they'd have to let us use rooms.

CAMPUS: Do you foresee anything like Gay Week? There recently was a Black Week on campus.

Savoie: I don't know. Maybe 'Gay Day.' I don't know if we can get a week. It took women a long time to get anything.

CAMPUS: Have you considered a DLS speaker on Gay Lib? Have you made overtures to Hollingsworth on this?

Savoie: I don't know if he knows we really are here in the numbers that we are. No, we haven't done that yet.

CAMPUS: Do you expect difficulty acquiring university recognition?

Savoie: They wouldn't dare refuse. The senate is the organization which grants recognition to student groups. If there was doubt, we would appeal to its liberal conscience. If the Senate did not extend recognition, we would make them appear ludicrous by picketing or other action.

CAMPUS: Do you have specific goals in the university community?

Savoie: We'd like to do a newsletter—poetry and commentary by people in the group. Some of the people want to talk to the ministers and counselors.

CAMPUS: Have you considered media coverage for the gay group?

Savoie: One of the reporters at the BANGOR DAILY NEWS wanted to do an article, but I said 'no earlier this semester. Nobody in the group wanted that kind of exposure. I don't trust anybody at that paper to do a decent job. I was skeptical about this paper, too.'

CAMPUS: Do you find things that straight people in the media say about gays a little warped?

Savoie: They say things differently than the way a gay would say them, but straights don't have the same things at stake. I don't know what the right attitude for the media is, except respectful. Tokenism really kills me. Human beings are human beings.

The media is insensitive that way. They're talking about 10 years ago and traditional attitudes—about 'fems' and 'queens' as though they were the only examples of gay men.

CAMPUS: One of the stereotypes of gays besides the 'fem' and 'queen' is an

alcoholic person. Why is that? Do gays drink to escape themselves or their problems?

Savoie: Alcoholism is encouraged in gays because the only places they could meet were bars. That's really taking advantage of people who have no other place to meet by charging \$3 for a beer.

CAMPUS: Will the group ever tackle the legislature in an attempt to change the laws prohibiting homosexual acts?

Savoie: Some of the men are currently investigating the laws. A campaign is possible. It is not a big priority right now. Right now we are in an initial phase of recognition, getting to know each other, developing a sense of community.

The group's social aspect came out at the end of last semester. Two or three people had birthdays. That was the first time people really felt social.

We want to do things together. People were talking last week. Why don't we plan a hiking trip together this spring? Why don't we plan a picnic? There's a nice feeling when we are together.

This is the first opportunity I've had to talk to other gays and not be hassled, or be in a bar. It's the need I knew was there.

CAMPUS: Do you foresee a time when lines distinguishing the sexes will fade?

Savoie: I don't think we will continue to distinguish. I hope we get to the point where we no longer label behavior as 'normal-abnormal' or 'deviant-nondeviant' because we already know that it's absurd.

It's absurd to say people who masturbate are worse than people who fuck all the time. Or that people who do it one way are better than people who do it a different way.

If they enforced the blue laws, we'd all be in jail. So ultimately I think people will want none of these distinctions to be made.